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Relation between magic and religion.—By CRAWFORD H. TOY,
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THREE views of the relation between religion and magic have been and are widely held: that magic is a degraded form of religion; that it is the parent of religion; and that the two are independent, mutually unrelated systems. These views appear to rest partly on too restricted an historical survey, partly on arbitrary definitions of terms, and partly on incorrect interpretations of religious phenomena. It is assumed that a refined conception of the relation between man and the deity existed from the outset; or that there is in religion an impure idea which cannot be explained except as the product of a low initial magical form of thought; or that religion as a friendly relation with the deity and magic as a hostile relation are mutually exclusive; or that magical procedures have always been regarded by primitive peoples as lying outside the sphere of religion; or that the continuous growth of culture would be impossible without an initial and persistent sense of friendship between man and the deity. The opposing theories are sometimes stated thus: if religion, in our sense of the term, had not existed from the beginning, it could never have existed at all; or, if religion had existed from the beginning, magic could never have existed at all.¹

It is very doubtful whether such hard-and-fast dividing lines can be assumed for early stages of religion. In the beginning everything seems to have been in flux—there were no sharp definitions of natural and supernatural, of gods and demons, or, in general, of friendly and unfriendly Powers.

¹ What is called "sympathetic magic" does not come under consideration here. Producing rain by sprinkling water on the ground, torturing a man by sticking pins into an image of him, killing him by destroying an image of him, acquiring his virtues by eating a part of him, getting control of him by learning his name or by securing a part of his person—all these belong to the savage conception of natural law, so far as savages may be supposed to have such a conception; they are specimens of savage science, and have nothing to do with religion. Cf. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, i. 9 f., and, for the view that these processes depend on the power of the conjurer over ghosts, Spencer, *Sociology*, i. § 134. We understand "magic" as meaning the power to control supernatural beings.

There was a vague sense of power (and, doubtless, of life) in all things. It was supposed that animals, plants, minerals and heavenly bodies, and parts of them (the foot or tongue of an animal, a leaf, a bit of stone), were able to produce or ward off sickness or death, and generally to affect the fortunes of men.¹ This universally present power does not appear to have been at first an object of worship—its recognition probably did not involve distinct religious feeling in our sense of the term; but in such recognition there was the germ of religion, the assumption of a relation between human life and a power outside the individual man. The doings of this power were of all sorts, helpful and harmful, and there was neither logical nor moral element in them. What might happen to a man from any object in the world was at first matter of pure chance; it was only after a long and painful experience that men were able to make trustworthy discrimination between phenomena, and classify them as beneficial or injurious. The attitude of early man toward his surroundings seems to have been one of doubt and caution; he had to be on his guard for the sake of his own welfare, and was prepared to be friendly or unfriendly as circumstances might seem to require.

This posture of mind is reflected in the stories of men and animals who, at a later stage, are the incarnations of power—the creative and formative personages of the beginnings of society proper.² The Coyote of the Redmen is a “culture hero,” but a non-moral and impish one, doing good or evil according to the freak of the moment; the procedures of the Australian “ancestors,” while they are not malicious, are still not directed by any well-defined desire to benefit men; and traces of these qualities are visible in similar personages of more cultivated societies, as in Heracles, and even in gods like Indra.

The distinction between “gods” (friendly members of the human community) and “demons” (unfriendly outside powers) seems to be relatively late. All such beings were in very early times classed together as agencies affecting man’s life. The two classes gradually assumed distinct characters, but, in the material

¹ For examples see J. H. King, *The Supernatural*, i. 66-131. The vague conception of power is summed up in the Melanesian word *mana*.

² See *Memoirs of the Amer. Folklore Soc. : Navaho Legends*, and *Thompson River Indian Traditions*; Spencer & Gillen, *Tribes of Central Australia*.

accessible to us, it is often hard to say to which class a particular figure belongs. Such a deity as the Hawaiian Pele (the goddess of the volcano), who is often vindictive, differs little from the demon that sends sickness and death.¹ The Babylonians gave the same name (*shedu*) to a class of demons, and to the protecting half-gods (allied to the Hebrew cherubs) that guarded the entrances to temples, sacred gardens, and palaces.² The Mohammedan doctors divided the jinn into the two classes of believing and unbelieving (that is, friendly and unfriendly), and the later Jewish tradition regarded certain demons as having fallen from an original state of goodness; these theological constructions may point to a belief in an original concord between gods and demons. The Navaho personages called *yeyi* and *anaye* seem to hover on the border line that separates the divine and demonic classes. The sun, according to the Thompson River folklore, was once a cannibal, but afterwards became beneficent. The element of hostility to man that appears in some well-developed gods may be regarded as the survival of an attitude which was once far more common.³

Early man, in his struggle for existence, protected himself against the powers about him, or secured their aid, as best he could, by force or by gifts. It is not only purely malevolent beings that are coerced in early forms of religion. A sacred image or symbol is maltreated or destroyed if it does not comply with the wishes of the possessor or worshiper. The Egyptians are said (by Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 73) to have slain their divine animals if these failed to avert or remove calamity. A divine king is put to death on certain occasions.⁴ A god may be carried off to a distant land and compelled to do duty there;⁵ or he may be confined in his temple to prevent his going away voluntarily or by constraint. Prometheus, the champion of man against Zeus, is victorious in the end, and the Homeric heroes fight and vanquish gods. The Indian *munis* by ascetic observances acquire such power as arouses the jealousy and fear of Indra.

¹ When a tribe is described as "demon-worshippers," this means only that it has not made the distinction between gods and demons.

² Jastrow, *Religion of the Babylonians and Assyrians*, pp. 260 ff.

³ So, for example, a number of Egyptian deities.

⁴ Many examples are given by Frazer in the *Golden Bough*.

⁵ So the Babylonian goddess Nana was carried away by the Elamites, and restored to her place, after 1635 years, by Assurbanipal.

The magician, in his earliest form, appears to be simply a master of the occult influences of the world. He controls the elements and the heavenly bodies, inflicts and cures disease, awards plenty or want, victory or defeat, kills and restores to life; he does all that the gods afterwards do, and in later times is their rival. At first he has no relations with extra-human persons; he is not dependent on them, and does not direct his efforts toward them—he is a man who is gifted (by whatever means) with the power of producing all sorts of results in the world. Later, when the occult influences take personal shape, as *daemonia*¹ of all characters, it is these that he controls. There are neither social nor moral distinctions in the earliest class of *daemonia*; they all affect men's lives, but they have no special friendly or unfriendly relations with individuals or communities, and their procedures are determined, not by considerations of right and wrong, but by whim or by motives unknown to men. But they are thought of as being amenable to certain laws, and the magician is the man who knows these laws, and is able, by employing certain means, to force these beings to do his will. He may control good powers or bad, and may himself at times be benevolent or malevolent; but he is always a recognized member of the religious community, employing methods which are regarded as lawful and right.

It appears, then, that the attitude of the early man toward supernatural Powers was composite, made up of friendship and hostility, reverence and suspicion. As society became better organized, these elements of religious feeling were more and more sharply discriminated, the tendency being to include only the friendly Powers in the social system, and look on the others as outsiders. By the time the organization in clans was brought to a state of relative completeness, the distinction between the two classes of deities was practically effected, and the history of civilizing religion begins at this point; men could not live in orderly society without coming to some sort of understanding with the most potent members of the community. But the clan proper is a relatively late institution, and it is a mistake to make it the starting-point of the history of religion.²

¹ If the term "spirit" be used for these beings, it must be borne in mind that they are not incorporeal.

² This is practically done by W. R. Smith and others.

The priest and the prophet are lineal descendants of the magician on one side of his function—the side of friendly communion, of intercourse with friendly Powers. The other side of him—the coercive function—comes to be more and more out of harmony with the feeling of the community, and acquires an anti-social and disreputable character. It becomes discourteous and disintegrating to attempt to force the god of the clan or tribe, and such violent procedure is prohibited by law.

Magic may possibly in some cases be the superstitious interpretation put by a relatively undeveloped people on the ritual of a higher religion which they have accepted.¹ It has been suggested that the term thus got its meaning: the Magi, it is thought, may have been looked on as sorcerers by the ignorant peoples on whom the Mazdean faith was forced.² The word was adopted by the Greeks not later than the early part of the 5th century B. C.,³ and the procedures of the Magi of that time are not known to us from other than Greek sources. It may be that they were then in part simple sorcerers, coercing the supernatural Powers, controlling the elements, and working good or evil on men in a non-moral way. But, even if such an explanation holds in the case of relatively advanced societies, it does not apply to the savage tribes among whom sorcery is most prevalent; it is hardly possible to conceive of their having come to it by a misunderstanding of higher forms of religion.

The facts seem to force us to reject the three views mentioned above, and to hold that the earliest beliefs and practices known to us contain the germs of both religion and magic, and that these have grown side by side, the one or the other getting the advantage in a given society according to the progress made in social organization. Law and order is what man desires and civilization moves toward—order among men so that they may be friends, and order between men and gods for a like reason. Magic, however, comes to mean disorder, and therefore has not been able, in civilized peoples, to maintain itself against religion, which stands for order.

¹ Tylor.

² Cf. Tiele, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, ii. 140.

³ Eurip., *Suppl.* 1110; *Iph. in Taur.* 1338; *Orest.* 1498; Plato, *Pol.* 280 D.